



# Rice Creek Associates Newsletter

Autumn 2020

## President's Comments

- Laurel Artz

Happy autumn everyone! Whether you are a pumpkin spice everything kind of person, or simply enjoy the cooler temperatures and all the beautiful colors, fall seems to have something for everyone. While we are not able to open the building or pavilion to the public due to Covid-19 precautions, we hope you will come enjoy the seasonal changes at RCFS. There is so much to enjoy on the trails this time of year. We even had a bear sighting at Fallbrook in early September!

The building may be closed, yet RCFS was actually a busy place over the summer. Several students, faculty, and other scientists were doing ongoing research and completing projects as part of the RCA Small Grants program. Information about our virtual Fall Event to share this work is included in this newsletter.

The Tuesday tree giveaway days continued for the Canal Forest Restoration Project. Monarch caterpillars were given a safe place to undergo metamorphosis at our monarch way station and butterflies were tagged upon release. The herb garden is looking great thanks to the ongoing efforts of the directors, several board members, and also some RCA friends, George and Heike Koenig.

While we could not have students on site, the Exploring Nature program carried on with Assistant Director Kristen Haynes and board member Paul Knittel hosting a series of weekly Facebook Live nature videos. You can find these interesting and informative videos on the **Rice Creek Field Station** Facebook page. Another series of videos, Field Notes, was created with some of the people currently engaged in research projects at RCFS. These are also on the Facebook page. Kudos to all involved, as we had to learn and grow to meet the challenges of the times.

Our RCA Reflections have been on hold during the pandemic. If you have suggestions for future Reflections topics, or an idea for something we might be able to offer virtually, please email them to [RCA@oswego.edu](mailto:RCA@oswego.edu).

We encourage you to come take a hike and enjoy the seasonal changes and the wonderful sights, sounds, and smells they bring. While on the trails, if you see something you think especially interesting, puzzling or unique, please take a photo and share it to the RCA Facebook page. We are found at **Rice Creek**. It is the FB page that displays our logo of the bird in the cattails plant. We look forward to enjoying your shared treasures.

## **New funding resources needed for RCA Small Grants program**

**Rice Creek Associates (RCA)** is a citizen support group of **Rice Creek Field Station (RCFS)**. Among its goals are to help RCFS meet its mission to preserve the area, understand its biology, advance knowledge of ecological processes and disseminate this information to the public. To meet these goals, RCA annually solicits proposals from scholars, scientists, educators and students for the **Rice Creek Associates Small Grants Program (SGP)**.

Since 1996 RCA has awarded 104 small grants, an average of 4 grants per year, with a total funding of \$132,000 awarded. Through these grants, we successfully produced user-friendly field guides describing the biological diversity of our local area. The four field guides available now are important resources to identify local small mammals, butterflies, insects and invasive plants without the need to sort through large and confusing regional or national field guides. A field guide for birds is in progress.

RCA small grants also helped several faculty members attract and train students in numerous disciplines. Based on research done recently at the Field Station, our students and faculty gave over 60 national and international presentations, ***18 of which won awards for best presentations.*** The research conducted by our faculty and students also produced ten research articles published in top-notch peer-reviewed Journals.

Funding for the Small Grants Program (SGP) from the college has been decreased due to financial constraints throughout SUNY at this time. Therefore, RCA needs to find new sources of donations to fund the SGP and keep this worthwhile program alive. Essentially, we aim to create a more sustainable monetary source. RCA does contribute a small amount every year, but we cannot sustain it alone. We hope that we can count on our RCA Friends, SUNY Oswego

Alumni, and others to see the value in donating to the SGP. Donations of all sizes are needed to help the SGP fund reach the current grant level of \$10,000 per year. You may make checks payable to: Oswego College Foundation/RCA. Please write Small Grants Program on the notes line. Checks may be mailed to: Rice Creek Field Station #23, 193 Thompson Rd., Oswego, NY 13126.

On Behalf of RCA and RCFS,

**-Laurel Artz and Kamal Mohamed**

## **Assistant Director's update**

### **Public Programs**

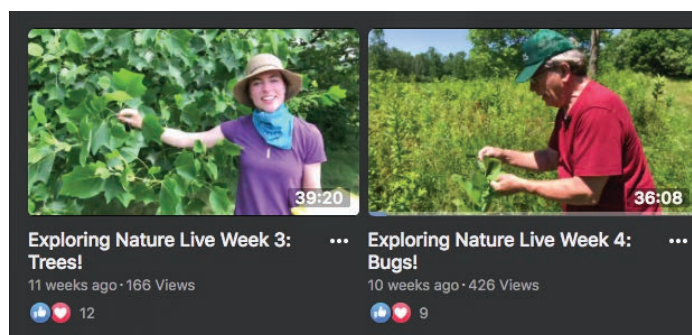
For many of us, spring and summer 2020 necessitated a rapid learning curve in all things technology. Rice Creek was no exception. Our task was to deliver nature-based programming digitally, and ideally in a live format. Thanks to several lengthy help sessions from student Shane Du Bois of Campus Technology Services, an exceptional amount of time and effort from RCA board member Paul Knittel, a few equipment upgrades, and the use of two to three devices simultaneously, we were able to pull it off and deliver two online program series via Facebook Live: (1) Exploring Nature Live, a reboot of our summer children's program, and (2) Field Notes, spotlights on Rice Creek research.

Together, Paul Knittel and I produced 14 programs: 11 for Exploring Nature and three for Field Notes. Topics for the former included bugs, wildflowers, aquatics, beavers, trees, monarchs, and more. For the latter, we highlighted Professor Nicholas Sard's eDNA work at Rice Creek, student Brooke Goodman's research on Northern Cardinal song repertoire, and Professor Jennifer Olori's amphibian disease monitoring program. So far we have had 277 minute-plus views for our Exploring Nature Live

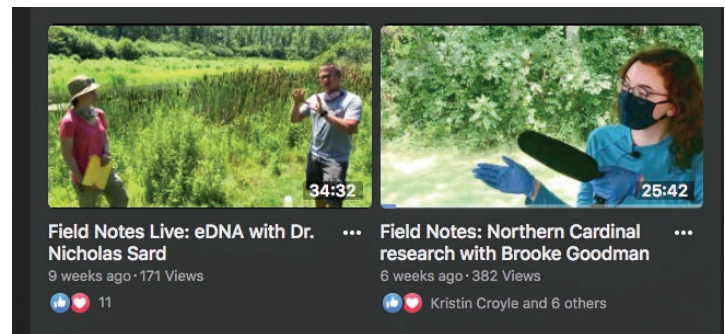
videos and 94 for Field Notes. An additional workshop on flower pressing and related crafts, hosted by RCFS naturalist Linda Knowles, garnered 38 minute-plus views.

We thank all those who joined us live or after the fact for these programs—especially those who were patient when technology did not always cooperate with us! I particularly wish to extend huge thanks to Paul Knittel for all of his tireless help.

Looking ahead this fall, next in the pipeline is a Field Notes segment highlighting RCA board member Mike Holy's work with the Rice Creek Butterfly Survey. Additionally, Shane Du Bois (see paragraph 1) has come on board as an intern at Rice Creek, and is working on editing and production of our regular video content such as Field Notes, as well as more advanced projects like 360° virtual tours of our trails. Keep an eye on our website for these in the coming months!



**Kristen Haynes and Paul Knittel hosted Exploring Nature Live this summer on Facebook Live. Videos are archived at [www.facebook.com/ozricecreek](http://www.facebook.com/ozricecreek).**



**Rice Creek professors and student researchers were spotlighted through a Field Notes series on Facebook. Videos are archived at [www.facebook.com/ozricecreek](http://www.facebook.com/ozricecreek).**

### Canal Forest Restoration Project

Although we could not have a presence at community events this summer, we nonetheless succeeded in distributing 57 trees (so far) to individuals who stopped by the field station during our public pickup windows. If you did not get the chance to pick up a tree or trees but you are interested, contactless pickup is continuing until the end of October. Fall is considered by many to be the best time of year to plant trees! If you are interested, please visit our website at [www.oswego.edu/rice-creek/canal-forest-restoration-project](http://www.oswego.edu/rice-creek/canal-forest-restoration-project) and click “request a tree.”

For those interested in supporting our project, one of the best ways is to collect seeds or let us know about potential collection sites. Trees can be identified using a free app like PlantNet. We are seeking acorns of white oak (*Quercus alba*), swamp white oak (*Quercus bicolor*), and burr oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*). Acorns should be added to zip-top bags with moist paper towels, along with an example leaf for identification purposes. They should be kept cool until they can be shipped to RCFS or dropped off.

For more information about the project, visit: [www.oswego.edu/rice-creek/canal-forest-restoration-project](http://www.oswego.edu/rice-creek/canal-forest-restoration-project).



**CFRP intern Piper Warren holding a burr oak that is ready for give-away.**



## **Science at Rice Creek:**

**2020 Small Grant Recipients are planning to present their findings as a virtual event this year.**

Unfortunately, COVID-19 will not allow for RCA's Annual Social to take place in-person. However, on Saturday, November 7, the RCA Board is planning to stream presenters of small grants 2020 projects live via zoom.

Updates and details will be posted to RCA Facebook page and <https://www.oswego.edu/rice-creek/academics-and-research/research/small-grants-program>

## **Rice Creek's Weather Station**



**Signage for the weather station includes a quote from Lucina Hernandez, PhD. Lucina was the Field Station Director from August 2008 to October 2013. She passed away Oct. 10, 2013 after a courageous fight with cancer. She was very fond of Rice Creek's seasons, saying—**

**“Rice Creek’s weather is a vision of beauty;  
a gift to appreciate every day”.**

## **Book review:**

### **The Secret Life of Flies by Erica McAlister**

Why read a book about flies? They are ugly, filthy, disease-spreading annoying creatures found everywhere, including Rice Creek, right? Author Erica McAlister, curator of Diptera at the Natural History Museum in London, has been all over the world to study these insects in exotic locations. Although she would agree they exist at our “exotic” Rice Creek, she would vigorously



disagree with that description. In fact, she adores them “because no other group is more adaptive, crazy or more ingenious in its morphology or nasty behavior.” She calls them adorable and cute, and says without them we’d be knee deep in excrement (literally) and have no chocolate (that she herself confesses she doesn’t even like). But she must like whiskey because she mentions that heather plays a key role in flavoring whiskey and “we can’t have anything affect that.” Apparently tachinid flies play an important role in controlling the heather beetle. Who knew?

This short and well-organized book is full of incredible color photographs with accompanying amusing descriptions. But it was the irreverent entertaining writing, based on rigorous science that kept me, a non-scientist, reading and learning about the insect we love to hate. And, if you would rather listen to Erica McAlister than read this great little book, look her up on YouTube to hear her talk about her love affair with flies, Scottish accent and all. I laughed out loud several times. Now if we could only get her to speak at one of our Reflection events!

I ordered *The Secret Life of Flies* two years ago after hearing a review and interview with the author, and just recently got around to reading it because I thought it was going to be too burdensome with scientific jargon. I was wrong about that. I’m not saying I will never again swat a fly, but I have definitely gained a new appreciation for this undervalued insect. And, even if I just can’t help getting out the swatter now and then, there are 17 million flies for each and every one of us! So, there isn’t any danger of wiping out their populations. That being said, wouldn’t it be worthwhile to learn more about this ubiquitous and diverse insect Order? I thought so, and hope you will, too. Enjoy!

**-Sheri Morey**

## **Rice Creek Field Guides make a great Christmas gift**

Fall is an great time to begin looking for the ideal Christmas gift for that special someone. Rice Creek’s field guides would be excellent for your nature family members and friends.

We currently have guides for mammals, invasive plants, butterflies and insects. While these guides have been specifically composed for the field station grounds, the fact that they are local publications makes them ideal for use in our local environs. Contact the field station at 315-312-6677 for further information and prices.

## **The Curious Mind**

This past summer I had the pleasure of helping RCFS reach out to its Facebook followers. We were happy to see so many curious minds wanting to know more about the plants and animals of Rice Creek as well as learning of those with a keen interest in the environmental research projects being conducted at the Field Station.

Because of the Covid-19 restrictions on gatherings, the highly favorable summer youth program, “Exploring Nature,” ventured into new territory - live broadcasting of nature programs via Facebook.

Each week in June and right up through the end of August, Kristen Haynes, RCFS’s Assistant Director, produced a series of “Exploring Nature” programs featuring the flora and fauna found along the trails, creek banks and the shoreline of the pond.

I had the good fortune to assist Kristen with the programs and found my time was well spent. It was fun and educational for me in many ways. The 30-minute “Exploring Nature” segments featured a wide variety of interesting topics from

aquatic life to bugs to the local beavers that live at the preserve.

Each live show was recorded and made available for viewing at any time. It became clear that the followers of Rice Creek like viewing on their own time, as we found increasingly more people were viewing the taped segments as the days went by.

Kristen also focused on the various research projects underway at the Field Station. These Facebook programs are called “Field Notes.” They were broadcasted live or recorded for a later broadcast. With these explorations of current research, Kristen asks pertinent questions as to the why’s and how’s of the research being conducted. The projects’ descriptions and the answers were intriguing. Right here, right now, real scientific research and discovery was taking place!

Research topics included: Amphibian Diseases Research, where the researchers waded into a vernal pond capturing frogs to examine them closely for disease and detecting eDNA along the creek using a computer program to analyze DNA fragments found in the creek water. This determined what creatures were present without ever capturing the specimens. Another research project had a student assessing the impact of urban and country noise on the variation of songs of the northern red cardinal bird.

Kristen also took a walk in the fields with Mike Holy, a RCA member, who has been conducting the longest continuous research project at the Field Station. For more than 20 years, Mike has been studying butterfly populations at Rice Creek, and you’d be hard pressed to find research like this taking place at other colleges in the area.

All in all, it was a great summer of exploration and understanding of the Rice Creek Field Station’s outreach. This is just one of the many

things that make the Rice Creek Field Station at SUNY Oswego so unique and important.

**-Paul Knittel**

## **Photographs matter**

You may recall that in our spring newsletter I shared some photos of spring scenes at Rice Creek. I deliberately kept from naming the organisms, stressing the importance of experiencing the natural world even though you may not know what everything is called.

Well, there are times when taking these photos leads to a true discovery. On June 17, 2015, I took a photo of a skipper butterfly. Taken at a distance, I wasn’t sure of its specific identity, and marked it as such on my data sheet. It was not until reviewing my documenting photos for 2015 this spring that I discovered it was a new species recording for the field station grounds.



It is an Indian Skipper (*Hesperia sassacus*). It can be observed in the months of May and June in New York State. Shapiro (1974) lists it as occurring in dry old fields and pastures. He describes the species as common over most of the state. Curiously, Glassberg (1999) notes its abundance as rare to uncommon, though it may be locally common. I observed it on the upper power line right-of-way area, a part of

my transect R-4 of the red trail. Since 1996 when this butterfly study was first begun, this is the only record documented.

While observing the wonders of nature at Rice Creek or anywhere else, opportunities await for any kind of discovery. It's all a matter of your purpose and perspective when one sets out for an adventure.

**-Mike**

## **Memorable moments at Rice Creek**

This is actually a very current memorable moment. For 25 years our survey of butterflies has been conducted on field station grounds. Along with recording we try to document each species with a photo. I have observed the Snout butterfly (*Libytheana carinenta*) fewer than a handful of times over those years, as it is not a permanent resident in this part of New York. Each time it was observed a photo was impossible to take.

On Sept. 23, I finally had the opportunity to photo-document the species. As you can see from the photo, the name Snout Butterfly is most appropriate.



**-Mike**

Please share with us a special experience you've had at Rice Creek. A picture is not required. It will appear in a future newsletter. Send it to me (Mike) at [fordlep@yahoo.com](mailto:fordlep@yahoo.com).

## **Rice Creek Field Station**

Rice Creek Field Station is a part of the State University of New York at Oswego. While its primary function is to provide facilities for field-oriented research and courses in the natural sciences taught at the college, facilities are also available for public education and recreation.

The field station houses superb collections, field equipment, and laboratories. It is surrounded by several hundred acres of forest, fields, trails and wetlands, including Rice Pond. School children visit the field station and many individuals and groups use the area for hiking and cross-country skiing.

Rice Creek welcomes dogs. However, to protect sensitive natural features and as a courtesy to other visitors, dogs should be on a six foot leash. Also, please be kind and clean up after your pet. Thank you.

Directions: To get to Rice Creek Field Station take Route 104, turn south on Thompson Rd., located 100 yards west of the College's main entrance. The field station is 1.4 miles on the right.

Hours:

Monday to Friday 9:00 am -- 4:30 pm

Saturday 9:00 am -- 3:00 pm

Trails are open dawn to dusk daily.

When visiting Rice Creek, please sign in and out at one of the brown registration boxes.

## RCA Board Elections

### Rice Creek Associates Board of Directors Ballot

Six positions are up for election. Indicate your choices and return by November 16.

#### Three-year terms (2021 through 2023)

- \_\_\_ Laurel Artz
- \_\_\_ Wendy Fragale
- \_\_\_ Mike Holy
- \_\_\_ Mary Magistro
- \_\_\_ Write-in \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ Write-in \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ Write-in \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ Write-in \_\_\_\_\_

#### Two-year term (2021 through 2022)

- \_\_\_ Gail Opanhoske
- \_\_\_ Write-in \_\_\_\_\_

#### One-year term (2021 calendar year)

- \_\_\_ Paul Knittel
- \_\_\_ Write-in \_\_\_\_\_

Complete and send to Rice Creek Associates,  
Bldg #23 SUNY Oswego, Oswego, N.Y. 13126  
or forward to rcfs@oswego.edu.  
**Oswego, New York 13126**

## Rice Creek is on Facebook



## Upcoming 2020 Reflection topics

All take place on Saturdays. **We will notify you if events are cancelled or delayed due to coronavirus concerns.**

### Presentation of Small Grants Research Projects

This will be a virtual presentation  
Rice Creek Associates  
November 7, 2020 2PM

**rivers end bookstore nature selections**  
November 14, 2020 2PM

## Membership renewal reminder

Our yearly membership runs from March 1 to February 28 to prevent renewals from coinciding with the Christmas season. Renewal category rates have not changed, despite our ever-increasing costs. If you have any questions concerning your current RCA membership, contact **Mike** at [fordlep@yahoo.com](mailto:fordlep@yahoo.com) or 315-622-1774 (leave message).

**We consider all member information confidential and will not share it with any other groups or businesses.**



Please notify us of any changes to your address, email, phone or name. We strive to send our newsletter and event notifications to you in a timely manner. Contact Mike at [fordlep@yahoo.com](mailto:fordlep@yahoo.com) to update your contact information.

Our Board of Directors thanks you for your support and looks forward to bringing you the best that Rice Creek has to offer.

**On your address label is a number that corresponds to the year through the month of February for which your membership dues are paid.** If you have not yet renewed for the March 2020 through Feb. 2021 membership year, please do so at your earliest convenience. Better yet, combine it with your upcoming March 2021- Feb. 2022 membership dues. **We appreciate your support!**

#### Current RCA Board Members

Laurel Artz, President  
Pat Jones, Co-Vice President  
Sheri Morey, Co-Vice President  
Wendy Fragale, Treasurer  
Michael Holy, Secretary, Newsletter Editor  
Maria Sagot, Small Grants Chair  
Paul Knittel  
Mary Magistro  
Gail Opanhoske  
Andrew McElwain  
Peter A. Rosenbaum

#### Rice Creek Field Station Staff

Kamal Mohamed, Director  
Kristen Haynes, Assistant Director  
Wendy Fragale, Secretary  
Alan Harris, Groundskeeper

### Join/renew RCA membership

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**All memberships are Mar. 1 - Feb. 28**

\_\_\_ New Membership

\_\_\_ Membership renewal

Level:

___ Student	5.00
___ Individual	10.00
___ Family/Couple	15.00
___ Contributing	25.00
___ Sustaining	50.00
___ Life	250.00
___ Corporate	500.00

I/We would like to make a **tax-deductible contribution in addition to membership fees** to the

\_\_\_ General Fund  
\_\_\_ Trail improvement  
\_\_\_ Exploring Nature Program for Children  
\_\_\_ Small Grants Program

in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_.

**Total enclosed (membership + contribution)**

\$ \_\_\_\_\_. Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to:

**Oswego College Foundation/RCA**

Return to:

**Rice Creek Field Station #23**

**SUNY Oswego**

## Life at Rice Creek



Cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*) in one of the Rice Creek rain gardens.



Painted turtle and snapping turtle hatchlings that new federal work-study students helped make their way to the pond.



The blue trail in late summer.

Rice Creek Associates  
RCFS #23  
SUNY Oswego  
Oswego, New York 13126

To: